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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [UK](#)
SUBJECT: (C/NF) UK CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF, PM FOREIGN
POLICY ADVISOR STRESS UK CANNOT FIGHT TWO WARS AT ONCE

Classified By: Ambassador Robert H. Tuttle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) UK Chief of Defense Staff Sir Jock Stirrup's June 24 public assertion that the concurrent deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan are severely taxing the capabilities of the British military provoked heavy media criticism of HMG's ability to effectively fight both conflicts. Stirrup told attendees at an on-the-record luncheon that the UK armed forces "are not structured or resourced to do two (conflicts) on this scale on an enduring basis, but we have been doing it on an enduring basis for years.... Until we get to the stage where (either Iraq or Afghanistan) comes down to a small scale, we will be stretched beyond the capabilities we have. That is not what we are structured for, nor is it what we plan for. We are very stretched at the moment. Until we get down to one operation at this scale, we are always going to be stretched." HMG's official line is that Stirrup's comments reflect no change in the UK's commitments to current operations, and any future drawdown of forces in Iraq will continue be conditions-based and carried out in consultation with Coalition partners. While the Armed Forces may be "stretched," senior military officers publicly describe the situation as "manageable," and express confidence that HMG is capable of meeting current levels of commitment.

12. (C/NF) Stirrup backed up this assertion with specific examples June 25, telling visiting S/I David Satterfield that he needs ground combat forces (differentiating from other support forces) and helicopters currently stationed in southern Iraq to be moved to Afghanistan as soon as possible. The helos in particular are necessary to provide essential force protection for UK military personnel in Afghanistan, Stirrup said. (Note: The UK has lost eleven service personnel in Afghanistan in the last two weeks. End note.) PM Foreign and Defence Policy Advisor Simon McDonald told Satterfield and Ambassador June 25 that in his planned July 16 statement to Parliament, PM Gordon Brown intends to link success in Iraq with a drawdown of UK troops there and a subsequent increase in British troop levels in Afghanistan. (Note: see septel for further reporting on S/I Satterfield's meetings. End note.)

13. (C/NF) Comment: MOD has been saying for some time that the current op tempo is unsustainable "over the long term," without expressing urgency about the situation or clearly defining how far away the breaking point is. In that context, Sir Jock's remarks are not a sea change in MOD's previous position. Nonetheless, Stirrup and McDonald were clear to us that HMG is moving ahead to plus-up Afghanistan as it draws down in Iraq. End comment.

14. (U) S/I Satterfield has cleared this message.

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